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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [11. Mideast](#)
- [12. Iran](#)
- [13. Muslims in US Society](#)

Key stories in the media:

All media continued to highlight Qassam rocket attacks on the western Negev and related developments, mainly a limited Israeli military response to the rocket fire. Yediot and Maariv bannered the fact that a rocket fell 500 m from PM Ehud Olmert, who visited Sderot on Thursday. Israel Radio reported that 40 Qassam rockets landed in Israel last night. A woman was moderately wounded on Thursday. The media reported that on Thursday the Defense Ministry organized the evacuation of 560 Sderot residents.

The media reported that the air force continued to hammer away at Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip on Thursday as the IDF made its first foray into the northern Gaza Strip, sending tanks and infantry to take over Qassam launch sites. Media quoted Palestinian sources as saying that 10 Palestinians died in the Israeli attacks, including a Hamas operative who was killed when the IAF dropped a bomb on a two-story building belonging to Hamas's Executive Force. Forty-five others were wounded in the bombing, which leveled the building and several next to it. Leading media reported that Hamas threatened to resume suicide bombings. Yediot reported that FM Tzipi Livni told German FM Frank-Walter Steinmeier in a phone conversation that, in the absence of effective action by the international community to bring an end to the shelling of Sderot, Israel will act to put an end to the attacks.

Defining the US response to Israeli strikes in the Gaza strikes as "minor," Israel Radio and other media quoted President Bush as saying on Thursday, at a joint White House press availability with British PM Tony Blair: "We talked about the Middle East, and we're concerned about the violence we see in Gaza. We strongly urge the parties to work toward a two-state solution.... The Prime Minister and I discussed the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. We recognized the deep humiliation that can come as a result of living in a land where you can't move freely, and where people can't realize dreams. We talked about the need to reject and fight terrorism. We understand the fright that can come when you're worried about a rocket landing on top of your home. I'm committed to peace in the Middle East, and I appreciate Tony Blair being a partner in peace." Israel Radio quoted State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack as saying on Thursday: "We are urging all parties to exercise restraint." The radio reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice talked on the phone with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas and PM Olmert. Israel Radio reported that Abbas asked Secretary Rice, German FM Steinmeier, and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to convince Israel to cease its attacks.

The Jerusalem Post quoted President Bush as saying during his meeting with Tony Blair: "We fully recognize that the Iranians must not have nuclear weapons." Yediot quoted Prof. Bernard Lewis as saying in a lecture before the America-Israel Friendship League that, were Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, it would not hesitate to make use of it. The newspaper also quoted former permanent US representative to the UN John Bolton as saying that the situation with Iran can be compared to Adolf Hitler's rush to the Rhine district.

Maariv cited Reuters as saying on Thursday that the State Department has told EU officials that it will not object to the establishment of a new mechanism to funnel money to the PA.

Ha'aretz quoted Western diplomatic sources familiar with the PA as saying that the forces loyal to Mahmoud Abbas fought well in the battle against Hamas fighters near the Karni Crossing, contrary to reports in the Israeli media. The diplomats emphasized the courage and resolution demonstrated by Abbas's loyalists, who were surprised by a larger Hamas force, yet succeeded in thwarting the attack. Maariv and the Jerusalem Post reported that Chairman Abbas escaped an assassination attempt.

Maariv reported that King Abdullah II of Jordan has recently been trying to promote the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. The concept is conditioned on Israel accepting the Saudi-Arab peace initiative. Maariv quoted senior Israeli officials that this is a "honey trap" and that Israel might find itself negotiating with Jordan having the upper hand.

Ha'aretz reported that its panel of experts examining the upcoming US presidential elections in light of US-Israel relations still prefers Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton over Sen. Barack Obama, but that

her advantage is eroding and sometimes seems about to vanish. The panel focuses on former Republican senator from Tennessee Fred Thompson as a potential presidential candidate.

Leading media reported that a meeting to be held today by the Labor Party's Central Committee will determine the party's future in the government. The Jerusalem Post reported that an investigation by the newspaper of US Securities and Exchanges Commission documents on Thursday revealed that former PM Ehud Barak continues to serve as a consultant for companies in the US and Israel. The Jerusalem Post said that this contradicted Barak's promise to sever his business ties before running in the Labor Party primaries.

Leading media reported that on Thursday the Likud's Knesset faction celebrated the 30th anniversary of their party's first rise to power. Ha'aretz quoted Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu as saying that, when Israel blew up the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, the late PM Menachem Begin "acted with great daring against international opinion and against the United States."

Yediot reported that on May 28 US representatives will meet with Iranian officials in Baghdad to discuss the situation in Iraq.

The Jerusalem Post quoted sources in the UMP, newly-elected French President Nicolas Sarkozy's party, as saying that Israelis should be pleased that he chose Bernard Kouchner, a defector from the Socialist Party, as his foreign minister. Other media cited the dismay of Israeli officials that Sarkozy made former French FM Hubert Vedrine responsible for the Israeli-Palestinian dossier.

Ha'aretz reported that this year Israeli companies have signed contracts for weapons deals with Chad at a tune of USD 15 million.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel, which has been invited to negotiate membership with the OECD, will be required to legislate against bribing foreigners if it joins the organization.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday four Israeli professors met at the University of Brighton (England) with representatives of Britain's University and College Union, the sponsors of a resolution proposing an academic boycott of Israel. Ha'aretz wrote that the British academics were not impressed by the Israelis' arguments.

Major media reported that Yisrael Meir Lau, the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, has withdrawn his candidacy for Israel's presidency.

The Jerusalem Post wrote that people around the world will be able to learn the lessons of the Holocaust in a bid to also prevent any future genocide through a seminar being offered this week to UN Officials. The newspaper said that the US Holocaust Memorial Museum is a co-initiator of the project.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Holon Children Museum's Dialogue-in-the-Dark exhibition, which recreates the sensation of blindness, will be available in the World Economic Forum on the Middle East, taking place in Jordan's Dead Sea resort this weekend.

Ha'aretz (English Ed) reported that an 11th-grader at the American International School in Kfar Shmaryahu raised about USD 100,000 earlier this month for a Jaffa-based afterschool program for disadvantaged Jewish and Arab youth.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post cited the results of a poll commissioned by Bar-Ilan University's BESA (Begin-Sadat) Center and the Anti-Defamation League:

-Fully 71 percent of Israelis believe that the US should launch a military attack on Iran if diplomatic efforts fail to halt Tehran's nuclear program, according to a new poll.

- Fifty-nine percent of Israelis still believe the war in Iraq was justified, while 36 percent take the opposite view.

-Some 65 percent believe that the US is a loyal ally of Israel, with only 11 percent saying the opposite. A slightly higher proportion, 73 percent, described President George Bush as friendly.

Forty-eight percent attributed US support for Israel to strategic considerations, while 30 percent credited American Jewry and 17 percent cited shared values and a shared democratic tradition.

-Regarding America's importance to Israel, there was near consensus:

91 percent said that close relations with the US are vital to Israel's security. Some 51 percent of respondents predicted that the US will ultimately impose an agreement on Israel and the Palestinians, while 43 percent disagreed.

-In addition, 52 percent of respondents described American Jewish support of Israel as "sufficient," while 33 percent did not. About half of all Israelis believe that American Jewry is in danger of disappearing due to assimilation, the poll found.

Yediot presented the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll conducted among registered Labor Party voters:

-"Were elections for leadership of the Labor Party held today, for whom would you vote?" Ehud Barak: 34 percent; Ami Ayalon: 32 percent; Amir Peretz: 14 percent; Ophir Pines-Paz: 11 percent; Danny Yatom: 5 percent.

"In case of a second round, for whom would you vote?" Ami Ayalon: 47 percent; Ehud Barak: 43 percent.

According to the Yediot poll, 69 percent of Israelis do not believe that a peace treaty can be reached with the Palestinians; 31 percent believe that peace can be reached. Fifty-eight percent of Israelis do not support the "land for peace" formula"; 28 percent do.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The government does not much want to start lengthy and ongoing ground operations. The army's performance in the war in Lebanon left no one with a taste for more."

Military correspondent Amos Harel and Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "In the Israeli view, Fatah is engaged in a holding action in the Gaza Strip."

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "A collapse of the PA as a government ... could fundamentally change the two-state concept that has underpinned Israeli policy since 1993 and the Oslo Accords."

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in Ha'aretz: "[Syria] knows there could be a heavy price to pay for a large-scale war, including the fall of the Alawite regime."

Block Quotes:

II. "The Winograd Paralysis"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (5/18): "Let nobody say there is no connection between the Winograd Commission and what we are doing about Gaza. For four days the government of Israel was paralyzed in the face of the Qassam rocket barrage.... Reoccupying the open area of the northern Gaza Strip -- which is between two kilometers to six-seven kilometers wide -- today requires slow and lengthy action to prevent casualties.... The government does not much want to start lengthy and ongoing ground operations. The army's performance in the war in Lebanon left no one with a taste for more.... A political echelon decision to allow the army to hit the Hamas military wing -- installations and military activists -- is the default that could be effective, if it is kept up over time. Assassinations of central activists have led, in the past, to a change in Hamas's behavior pattern. The condition is: persistence, perseverance. But around here, if Hamas does not launch Qassam rockets for two days, the wind will go out of the sails and the assassinations will also stop, until the next round. And who, here in Israel, will answer for the last four days of paralysis?"

II. "Duel to the Death?"

Military correspondent Amos Harel and Palestinian affairs

correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (5/18): "As far as Hamas is concerned, the meaning of postponing the confrontation would be a substantial strengthening of Fatah. Hamas decided to embark on an organized and well-timed campaign.... Fatah in the Gaza Strip, without [its military chief Muhammad] Dahlan, has no landlord. Behind the recent escalation, the Israeli security establishment is identifying the clear fingerprints of Khaled Mashal, head of the Hamas politburo in Damascus. The firing of the Qassam rockets on Sderot immediately after the deadly ambush that Hamas laid for Fatah people traveling in a bus near the Karni border crossing, has been interpreted in the army as an action aimed at diverting the intra-Palestinian debate from the subject of the murderousness of Hamas to the conflict with Israel. In the Israeli view, Fatah is engaged in a holding action in the Gaza Strip."

III. "What a PA Collapse Would Mean For Israel"

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (5/18): "The spiraling anarchy inside Gaza is not something Israel can watch from outside. A collapse of the PA as a government, something that the events of the last few days have shown is a real possibility, would have far-reaching strategic ramifications for Israel and could fundamentally change the two-state concept that has underpinned Israeli policy since 1993 and the Oslo Accords.... Faced with the possibility that the PA could collapse, Israel is essentially faced with two unattractive choices: drop the three conditions established

when Hamas came into power and deal with a Hamas-led PA, under the logic that some address is better than none at all, or side with Fatah in its battle with Hamas."

IV. "A War This Summer?"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in Ha'aretz (5/18): "[As far as Israel is concerned,] the most complex problem is Syria. There is no question that Syria is readying for combat. Again, the question is whether it has plans to initiate a war, or suspects that Israel does.... Syria is capable of surprising Israel, mainly through hit-and-run attacks. But it knows there could be a heavy price to pay for a large-scale war, including the fall of the Alawite regime. A cautious conclusion is that none of the parties [in the Middle East] today are interested in an all-out war. But war could erupt by mistake. For example, if the other side's intentions are incorrectly assessed, or if a local military campaign veers out of control and sparks a major showdown. For safety's sake, Israel needs to step up its vigilance in the sphere of intelligence, as well as to reinforce IDF troops on the Golan Heights and hone the army's quick-response capabilities."

12. Iran:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It is in Europe's hands whether Iran's challenge means war or not."

Block Quotes:

"Europe's Choice"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (5/18): "Fortunately, some action is being taken [about the Iranian nuclear program]. Two important bills, the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act and the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act, are making their way through the US Congress. If enacted, they would accelerate a process of divestment by state pension funds from non-US companies invested in Iran (direct US investment is already barred).... Actually, it is in Europe's hands whether Iran's challenge means war or not. Europe must choose between its commercial interests and its desire to avoid war. If the US and Israel are left with no option but military action, European shortsightedness will be to blame. Europe needs no further UN resolutions to act; it needs to decide to divest

itself from Iran."

13. Muslims in US Society:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The day that one organized gang succeeds in carrying out the first large-scale homegrown Muslim attack will be the real test of America's tolerance."

Block Quotes:

"A Homegrown Attack"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (5/18): "The Muslim community in the US is small but growing rapidly. It is very diverse, stemming from different cultures, and its members speak many languages and therefore can strike roots. It is not easy to be a Muslim in America, say the community leaders, and rightly so. And nevertheless, apparently it is easier in the US than in the places they came from.... This challenge is easy neither for the US, nor for the Muslims living there. For the time being, everyone is handling it well. The events of September 11 were followed by attacks on mosques and Muslims, but that phenomenon continues to exist on a very small scale. America's involvement in wars in Muslim countries increased the number of Muslim Americans who can find an excuse to plan a terrorist attack, but the gang now referred to as the 'Fort Dix Six' is a worrisome exception, not yet part of a tsunami washing over America.... The day that one organized gang

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succeeds in carrying out the first large-scale homegrown Muslim attack will be the real test of America's tolerance."

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